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ON THE NATURALISTIC BACKGROUND OF THE  
'FROG-HYMN,' RIG-VEDA 7. 103

HAROLD H. BENDER

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

The so-called 'frog-hymn,' RV. 7. 103, has been frequently and variously discussed, but since Professor Bloomfield's article in *JAOS* 17. 173 ff. there has been no reason to doubt that it is a serious, practical, sacerdotal rain-charm.<sup>1</sup> It may be possible, however, to add a point or two by way of corroboration of Bloomfield's view, and by way of exegesis of the hymn itself.

The relationship between the frogs of the hymn and the frogs of nature has been rather vaguely assumed, but nowhere sufficiently insisted upon. For example, altho it is of course taken for granted, no Vedist, so far as I am aware, has made even the definite statement that in India the frogs actually do croak at the beginning of the rainy season. But there is somewhat more of a zoogeographical background to the hymn, and incidentally more evidence for the rain-charm theory, than appears in Macdonell's statement (*History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 121) that 'the awakening of the frogs at the beginning of the rainy season is here described with a graphic power which will doubt-

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<sup>1</sup> The chief argument against this view and in behalf of the once widely held, but now obsolete interpretation of the hymn as a satire on the Brahmans has been based upon the conception that the frog is a grotesque and even repulsive animal. But to many people and peoples he is very far from being either. The respectful comparison of Brahmans with frogs is no more violent than the assignment by the Greeks of the little horned owl of southern Europe to Pallas Athena as an emblem of her wisdom. Notice, e. g., *Brehms Tierleben*, 4. 283: '[Flower] erzählt, dass während der Regenzeit, als jeden Abend Schwärme von Insekten, vom Lichte angezogen, ins Haus kamen und zur Essenszeit sehr lästig wurden, ein oder zwei solcher Frösche [Indian bullfrogs] auf den Esstisch gesetzt wurden. Sie schienen zu verstehen, was von ihnen verlangt wurde, denn anstatt wegzuspringen oder sich von den Gästen oder Dienern beunruhigen zu lassen, fingen und verzehrten sie die fliegenden Insekten nacheinander, wenn diese auf den Tisch landeten.' See also Waddell, 'Frog-worship' (in Nepal), *Indian Antiquary*, 22. 293 ff.

less be appreciated best by those who have lived in India'; or than appears in the key-note of Bloomfield's article (p. 178): 'The frog in his character of water-animal par excellence quenches fire, produces water where previously there was none, is the proper repository for fever, and finally is associated with the annual appearance of rain in the rainy season.'

It is an almost universal superstition, if not a fact, that the croaking of frogs is a sign of rain. It is well established that the tree-frog, 'the prophet of the summer showers,' is apt to croak when the barometer is low and rain is impending. It is quite possible that the more aquatic species do likewise. An army captain tells of their suddenly appearing at the first sign of rain and croaking by the thousands on the sandy drilling grounds of a fort in Arizona. This frequently occurs after months of drouth and of silence on the part of the frogs. If the Vedic Indians observed that the coming of the rains was preceded by the croaking of frogs, or even if the croaking and the rain were simultaneous, it would have been natural, yea inevitable, for them to conclude that the frogs were responsible for the breaking of the rains. There is, in fact, more than a bit of native evidence that the Hindus viewed the frogs as 'rain-callers.'

In America, as in Europe and temperate latitudes in general, frogs hibernate in winter. In India, as in other tropical countries, they estivate during the dry season, i. e. they bury themselves deep in the sand or soil and silently await the coming of the rains. They emerge by the thousands from their places of estivation at the beginning of the rainy season; they breed when they thus emerge in the tropical spring from their retreats; they croak chiefly during the breeding period, the croak being the sexual cry of the male. When a large number of individuals join in the performance, as is usually the case, the concert at the beginning of the rains is simply deafening and is audible miles away.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in a very real sense, the croaking of the frogs

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. in general *Brehms Tierleben*, 4th ed., edited by Otto zur Strassen, Leipzig and Wien, 1911-1915, vol. 4: *Die Lurche und Kriechtiere* von Alfred Brehm, neubearbeitet von Franz Werner, 1912; *Cambridge Natural History*, vol. 8: *Amphibia and Reptiles* by H. Gadow; Mary C. Dickerson, *The Frog Book*, New York, 1913; E. G. Boulenger, *Reptiles and Batrachians*, New

ushers in the Indian rainy season, and by an easy *causa causata* is considered responsible for it.

The texts make it plain that the croaking of the frogs is preceded by a period of silence. In the *Harivamśa*, *Viṣṇuparvan* 95. 23 = 8803, the frogs croak after having slept eight months. In RV. 7. 103. 1, 8, and 9 the frogs raise their voices after having lain silent for twelve months. The silence of the frogs is, of course, that of estivation. The longer period would count from the first appearance of the frogs in one year to their first appearance in the next year, or from the beginning of one rainy season to the beginning of the following one. The shorter period would reckon from the end of the rains one year to their beginning in the next year. In the Panjab the rainy season lasts four months—June, July, August, and September.

In many cases when the texts especially designate the sex of the frog, it is the female (*maṇḍūkī*, *maṇḍūkikā*) that croaks (cf. AV. 4. 15. 14, and Bloomfield, p. 179 and note). Biologically, however, the female frog has little or no voice and only the male croaks. But as frogs have no external organs of copulation, the Hindus could not have distinguished male and female. Even a frog itself cannot determine by sight the sex of another. At the breeding period a male frog approaches another frog and embraces it; if the latter croaks it is recognized as a male and is released. Doubtless this breeding is described in our hymn: '[Stanza 3] When, the rainy season having arrived, it has rained upon them longing and thirsting, then crying *akhhkhala*, as a son to his father one approaches the other (who is) croaking.<sup>3</sup> [Stanza 4] One of them seizes the other when they have both delighted in the pouring forth of the waters<sup>4</sup>; when the

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York, 1914; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s. v. *Batrachia*, *Hibernation*. See also G. A. Boulenger, *The Tailless Batrachians of Europe* (in publications of the Ray Society), 1897-8, vol. 1, especially p. 62 ff.; E. Massat, 'Les Cris des Batraciens,' *Cosmos*, Paris, 1911, vol. 64; J. Gal, 'Chant de la Rainette,' *Bull. Soc. Étud. Sc. Nat.*, Nîmes, vol. 35.

<sup>3</sup> The seer should not be blamed for failing to observe that it is only the approaching (male) frog that is croaking; it is admittedly difficult to detect a frog in the act of croaking.

<sup>4</sup> The sexual 'seizing' lasts often for hours and even days and would certainly be noticed frequently by the rishi-naturalist.

frog sprinkled by the rain hopped about,<sup>5</sup> the speckled joins voice with the green.' Here we have together and in proper sequence the beginning of the rains, the croaking, and the breeding—in the hymn as in nature.

The emphatic distinction in stanzas 4, 6, and 10 between the speckled and the green frogs attracts attention. This classification of frogs into two kinds, the speckled and the green, apparently goes by parallel straight thru the hymn. The one approaches the other, *anyó anyám* (stanza 3); the one seizes the other, *anyó anyám* (stanza 4); both kinds rejoice in the waters (4); the speckled joins voice with the green (4); the one repeats the cry of the other, *anyó anyásya* (5)<sup>5a</sup>; the one bellows like an ox, the other bleats like a goat (6 and 10); the one is speckled, the other is green (6 and 10). In stanzas 4 and 10 dual verbs are used—with subjects in the sense of 'both kinds, the speckled and the green.' It is more than possible that the colorings were considered an indication of sex. If the parallel holds, and it seems to hold perfectly, the male frog, speckled and deep-voiced, approached, seized, and bred with the female, who was green and had less voice.<sup>6</sup>

It is quite certain, however, that in the hymn different genera are indicated, either consciously or unconsciously—and in the case of the speckled frog, possibly a definite species. According to Brehm, the frogs and toads of India are *Ranidae* (true frogs and flying frogs), *Engystomatidae* (small-mouthed frogs), and *Pelobatidae* (toad frogs). To the second of these families belongs the numerous, wide-spread, large, brown-yellow-black-red-gray speckled Indian Bullfrog, *Callula pulchra* Gray, whose voice resembles the bellow of an ox.<sup>7</sup> Twice in the hymn we

<sup>5</sup> *kániskan*: frequentative rather than intensive. Bloomfield, 'did skip.'

<sup>5a</sup> Despite Wackernagel, *Altindische Grammatik*, 2. 1. 322 (cf. also Brugmann, *Grundriss*, 2. 1. 95), I am unable to see any indication, either in forms, accent, syntax, or context, of reciprocal action in stanzas 3, 4, or 5.

<sup>6</sup> That there was, at least later, a consciousness of the sex-element in the hymn is suggested by Harivamśa, Viṣṇuparvan 95. 23 = 8803, 'a passage which is clearly modelled after sts. 7 ff. of our hymn . . . : "The frog having lain asleep eight months croaks with his wives."' (Bloomfield, p. 178).

<sup>7</sup> It inhabits the Indian mainland from Ceylon to China, and is known and distinguished everywhere for its variegated coloring and for its remarkably

find, if not the direct statement, at least the clear indication by parallel that the speckled frog has a deep voice and bellows like an ox, and that the green frog bleats like a goat, i. e. has less voice: 'One bellows like an ox (*gómāyur éko*), the other bleats like a goat; one of them is speckled, the other is green' (stanza 6); 'The one that bellows like an ox, the one that bleats like a goat; the speckled one and the green one have both given us wealth' (stanza 10). In *Kāuśika* 93. 4 and 96. 1 and 3 *gómāyu* above is used outright as a name for a particular kind of frog—quite possibly the Indian bullfrog. There are various species in India of green (or, for that matter, yellow or greenish-yellow) frogs that 'bleat like a goat,' that have less voice: 'bearing a common name, but of different color-and-shape, they modulate their voice in various ways when they speak' (stanza 6).

That the hymn is on the whole hieratic cannot be denied, and one must agree, rather regretfully, to be sure, with Bloomfield (p. 176) in rejecting the picture of a 'mildly frenzied rhapsodist among the people, or, perhaps, . . . some Rāja's poet laureate "given to infinite tobacco" [to keep away the mosquitoes!], as he walks along the jungle in the cool of the evening, at the opening of the rainy season, eager to bag some good subject for the delectation of the court of his patron.' But even if the

loud voice. For a full description of its habitat, markings, habits, and voice see Brehm, 1. c., p. 281 ff. Notice p. 283: 'Später macht Flower auf Grund seiner Beobachtungen in Siam noch weitere Mitteilungen über den Indischen Ochsenfrosch . . . Während der Regenzeit in Bangkok ist fast jeden Abend nach einem regnerischen Tage die Luft voll von dem dröhnenden Gequake dieser Frösche, das wie "eung-ahng eung-ahng" klingt und, bald fallend, bald ansteigend, die ganze Nacht fortgesetzt wird. [Cf. stanza 7 of the hymn: 'Like Brahmins at the all-night soma-sacrifice, chanting around the full soma-bowl (pool).'] An manchen Strassen, die beiderseits von Wasser begrenzt sind, und wo Callula häufig ist, kann man buchstäblich seine eigene Stimme nicht hören.'

The voice of the Indian bullfrog is elsewhere described by Flower as 'wau-auhhhhk.' With *akhkhala* in stanza 3, above, Bloomfield (p. 174, note) compares *βρεκεκεκεξ κοᾶξ κοᾶξ*. But according to G. A. Boulenger (above, p. 63) the cry of Aristophanes' chorus of frogs is that of *Rana esculenta*, which is not a speckled, but a green frog. I grant, however, that little weight can be put on efforts accurately to describe the voice of frogs. Probably no two modern observers would agree entirely upon a phonetic transcription of the voice of any species.

ecclesiastical 'Stimmungsbrechung' at the end was, as seems likely, the production of the author of the remainder of the hymn, I submit, nevertheless, that the rishi was not so absorbed in the prospects of bakhshish that he could not afford the time to observe with patient care the frogs at their play and to describe with genuine interest and enthusiasm what he saw. Notice, in addition to what has already been said, stanza 5 of our hymn: 'When one of them repeats the cry of the other, as a student (that) of the teacher, then all that with them is like a well-executed<sup>s</sup> lesson, when with a loud voice they croak upon the water.' One croaks in one direction, another croaks in another direction; then a whole chorus arises as if a great group of students were repeating the words of the teacher. Any one who has observed frogs will recognize this as an accurate and vivid description.

Finally, to Bloomfield's evidence of the use of the frog in rain-charms may be added a point from the report of ritual uses in Lanman's edition of Whitney's translation of the Atharva-Veda. AV. 3. 13 is addressed directly to the waters and is prescribed in whole or in part for four different purposes: to be used with a frog in a ceremony for directing water into a certain course (Kāuśika 40. 1 ff.); to accompany the conducting, in the *agnicayana*, of water, reeds, and a frog over the altar-site (Vāitāna 29. 13); to be used by one desiring rain (Commentary); to be employed in a rite for good fortune (Kāuśika 41. 14). Here we have in the native employment of one hymn all the elements of frog-ritualism except its use as a cure for fever.

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<sup>s</sup> Cf. Bloomfield, p. 174 and note.